

Developing Ability

“Great ability develops and reveals itself increasingly with every new assignment.”

— Baltasar Gracian, *The Oracle*

When the Governor’s Commission on People with Disabilities presented scholarships to 16 students from across Arkansas, the focus was on ability – not disability.

All the students, whether they be recent high school graduates or nontraditional college students, have at least one ability in common – a sense of service, to themselves, their communities, and others less fortunate. These are students who will excel – whatever the odds – because they are willing to take risks, make sacrifices, and take on the “impossible.”

This year’s winners are

Bethany Dawn Baldwin, who is graduating from Oak Grove High School in North Little Rock in the top 10 percent of her senior class and is class vice president. Bethany’s profound hearing loss has not stopped her from achieving her goals and performing at her best. She has contributed more than 200 community volunteer hours through her church, as a campaign volunteer, and on the Arkansas Can Do Committee. Last year when elected state treasurer for Girls State, she quoted Eleanor Roosevelt, whom she deeply admires, “No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.”

Charles Arthur Browning Jr., a 1999 graduate of J.A. Fair High School in Little Rock whose long-term goal is to become a counselor. Charles has overcome many obstacles as a result of a mental disability and has contributed more than 100 volunteer hours to various community organizations and programs. In addition to attending Pulaski Technical College, he works part-time and lives independently. Charles is known for his willingness to help those less fortunate than himself. He is a studious and hardworking individual.

Rachel Ann Bryant, a student at Morrilton High School. She plans to major in music education and minor in special education at Arkansas Tech. Rachel has served as the captain majorette for three years and participated in both the marching and jazz band

at her school. Her volunteerism includes Relay for Life, AmeriCorps, and Race for the Cure. Rachel was born three months premature, which resulted in her retinas not developing. “I used to think that not being able to see was a curse,” she says, “but over the years I have found that I can use it to help people.”

Aaron Michael Calvin, a student at Benton High School. Aaron has received two letters of acceptance – one from Arkansas Tech University and the other from Arkansas State University. He is the recipient of the 2006 Ralph Bunche Community Service Youth Leadership Award and is active in his community and school, putting in more than 110 hours of volunteer hours. Aaron plans on majoring in journalism and broadcasting with the intent of pursuing a sport-network career. He says his asthma has taught him to slow down and take life one day at a time and never take anything for granted.

Emily “Renee” Carroll, a wife, mother, and senior majoring in criminology at Arkansas State University in Jonesboro. Renee plans on pursuing a counseling career working with children who are victims of abuse or violent crimes. She has overcome multiple disabilities. Her family means everything to her, and she strives to be the best she can for them. “She is an exceptionally gifted young woman, who takes the act of learning very, very seriously,” one of her professors writes.

Lacey DePriest, who will graduate from Mountain Home High School with a 3.15 grade point average. She plans to attend Arkansas State University in Mountain Home and major in elementary education. Lacey has always been an integral part of the extracurricular activities at school and in her community. She often sacrifices her own time to help other students. She has never allowed her blindness to hold her back. She volunteers at the Christian Clinic, Salvation Army, and Kids Day America and works part-time at a local restaurant.

She baby-sits in her free time.

Natalie Lynn Evans, a senior at Little Rock Central High School. She has been accepted to Ouachita Baptist this fall, where she plans to major in broadcasting journalism. Natalie has never allowed cerebral palsy to limit her intellectual abilities or her community volunteerism. She is the managing editor of her school's 2005-06 yearbook and a special appointee to the Youth Leadership Institute. She volunteers for Arkansas Children's Hospital, Camp Aldersgate, Race for the Cure, and her church. She is known for being extremely perceptive, compassionate, and willing to serve others.

Lauren Gonzalez, who is graduating from Mt. Vernon-Enola High School. She will attend Arkansas State University at Beebe where she plans to major in business with a minor in education. Her goal is to teach secondary education business classes. After missing a semester of her senior year due to a severe automobile accident June 4, 2005, Lauren has demonstrated her unlimited inner strength to keep current in all her classes in an effort to graduate with her classmates. She has served as a volunteer with the Mt. Vernon-Enola After School Program; Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America; and the Quiz Bowl. "In life, things happen that a person least expects," Lauren says. "I feel so honored and privileged to have a second chance in life. By the grace of God, I have a wonderful second chance."

Heather L. Harper, a senior at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. Her major is English with a minor in secondary education. Upon graduation, she wants to teach English in the North Little Rock School District. Born with cerebral palsy, Heather says, "This disability has been more of a blessing to me." Because of her positive attitude, she has received numerous awards and contributes endless hours of volunteering within her

community, school, and church. Four years ago, her high school counselor wrote: "Sometimes a star can't shine until it steps out of the shadows of others." Heather has proven her to be correct.

Mary Katherine "Katie" Kirkpatrick, a second-time recipient of this scholarship award. Katie attends NorthWest Arkansas Community College and plans to teach computer skills to children. Born weighing 1 pound, 9 ounces, Katie has chronic lung disease, ADHD, and coordination difficulties, yet she gives endless volunteer hours to her community and church, as well as to St. Vincent's Hospital, the Humane Society, and Helping Hands. Her determination enables her to accomplish her goals and be a role model. Katie has participated in the Youth Leadership Forum, co-sponsored by the Governor's Commission on People with Disabilities and Arkansas Rehabilitation Services.

Mary Carolyn McKinney, a student at Bentonville High School, where she takes AP classes and maintains a 3.54 GPA. After graduation, Mary plans to attend Missouri State University in Springfield. Her goal is to become a nurse working at a hospital, which will allow her to continue her volunteer work in her church's music ministry. Since being diagnosed with Type I diabetes, Mary has attended camps and classes to learn the latest technology used in the fight to cure the disease. She is the vice president of FCA, co-captain of the cheerleaders, and a member of her high school band, the a cappella group, and chamber choir.

Daniel D. Mickle, a second-year scholarship award recipient. He attends the University of Arkansas at Fort Smith, where he is majoring in accounting. His community involvement, list of honors, and more than 35 awards reveal a remarkable young man beating the odds after the removal of a brain tumor. As a result of his surgeries, he had a

stroke in August 2003 at the age of 16, which affected his left side. "I am the same now as when I was 16 – only older and with a new outlook on how great life is," he says, "and that we take a lot for granted each day, like taking a step."

Chad Jarrell Nealy, a student at Star City High School with a 4.18 GPA. He plans to attend the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville this fall. His goals include majoring in political science and earning a graduate degree in law so he can become a corporate lawyer. Being born with spina bifida occulta has not stopped this young man from pursuing his dreams or being involved in extracurricular activities. Chad has accumulated more than 300-plus volunteer service hours.

Jessica Shanell Williams, who is graduating from Hot Springs High School with a GPA of 3.1. She will attend the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, where she plans to major in business administration. Her goal is to work in health care administration. She serves as a member of the Hot Springs Mayor's Youth Council and Hot Springs Youth Leadership Class II. She participates in Medical Applications of Science for Health Professionals and Relay for Life. Jessica is the president of the Key Club, Diamonds in the Rough, her high school band, and color guard. She was diagnosed with Type II diabetes in November 2003.

Charles "Wesley" Wilson, a 2002 graduate of Emerson Public High School, where he was the valedictorian of his senior class. Wesley attends Southern Arkansas University and has a 3.5 GPA. He is studying animal science and intends to get his master's degree. Wesley had planned on being a veterinarian specializing in large animals, but a diving accident in May 2001 changed his life and goals. He is now preparing to be an animal science professor. He is the parliamentarian for CFFA, past president of FFA, and

a BETA member. Wesley also serves as a motivational speaker for the Arkansas Spinal Cord Commission. Although he has to do all his assignments with a mouth stick and computer, Wesley says, "I do not intend for this injury to stop me from completing my goals."

Roberta "Bobbi" L. Yohn, a nontraditional student, mother of five, and grandmother of seven. She attends North Arkansas College in Harrison. After completing her associate's degree, she plans to continue her education at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville. Her goal is a master's degree in social work. Eighteen years of using a wheelchair as a result of paraplegia does not prevent her from achieving her goals, which is obvious from her numerous community volunteer hours. She contributes at least 10 hours a week tutoring other students; she coordinates the college's drug awareness program, was a senator repre-